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Century Association
(New York, N.Y.)

The Century Association's
memorial statue of...

[New York]

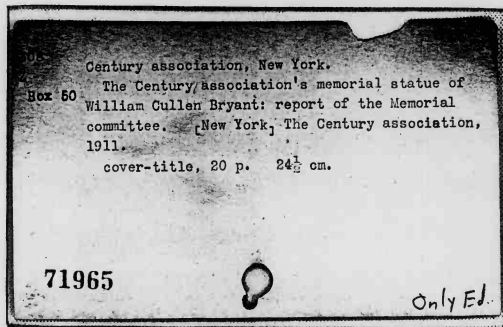
1911

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Gift

W. C. Bryant
JUL 12 '11

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION'S
MEMORIAL STATUE OF
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION BUILDING
1911

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THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION'S
MEMORIAL STATUE OF
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

REPORT OF
THE MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

Gentlemen of the Century:

It may be within the memory of some of you, unhappily very few, I fear, that at a meeting of our Century Association, when its home, of blessed memory, was in Fifteenth Street, and on the evening of the second of June, 1888, the following resolution was adopted:

RESOLVED, That a Committee of three be appointed to receive subscriptions, and when sufficient funds are secured, to take all other necessary measures for the erection of a Monumental Statue of the late William C. Bryant, on a site to be selected by the Committee.

Though not present at this meeting, I was informed that I had been designated as chairman of it, and John H. Gourlie and Thomas Hicks as my associates.

At my request for an addition to the committee, in the following month of December, its number was

increased to seven by the addition of the names of A. Foster Higgins (who afterward, in consequence of his business engagements, withdrew), A. R. McDonough, Percy R. Pyne, and H. F. Spaulding.

I am now prepared to lay before you the committee's report, and to announce that the memorial statue, for the elevation of which the committee was constituted, will be unveiled on the twenty-fourth day of October next.

Unfortunately there is to be no meeting of the Century Association of so early a date as this; and as the unveiling is an event which every Centurion will desire to witness, I have felt it my duty to transmit my report in print, to secure this privilege to as large a proportion of our Association as possible.

I hardly need say to you that I cheerfully accepted the trust imposed upon me by our Association, and proceeded at once to collect the money for its execution. In that work I had comparatively little difficulty, assisted as I was by Mr. McDonough, who, in those days, as some of you may remember, practically incarnated the Century.

I issued a brief circular announcing that no subscriptions would be received from any member for amounts exceeding two hundred and fifty dollars—to which step I had been prompted by the receipt of a check from Samuel J. Tilden for one thousand dollars and another from Percy R. Pyne for five hundred dollars. The superfluities of both these contributions were promptly declined.

The money was ready for the monument years

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before our committee could procure a suitable site for it, which we sought in vain in the Central Park for years. Meantime our application had become complicated with local politics. The friends of William M. Tweed, in the halcyon days of his career, took it into their heads that he deserved a monument, and they set on foot a scheme to erect one for him in the Central Park.

The Park Commission were happily inspired by this movement promptly to adopt a rule that no monuments of the living should be erected in the public parks. To the *Evening Post's* unrelenting criticism of Tweed and of his allies during Mr. Bryant's life, and its vigorous advocacy of the law which kept the monuments of living men out of the park, I attributed to no inconsiderable degree the insensibility to our appeals for a site for a memorial of Mr. Bryant.

In 1884, and in contemplation of the removal of the Reservoir from the Fifth Avenue, I applied to Salem H. Wales, a warm personal friend, who, with John D. Crimmins and William L. Olliffe, were the Commissioners of Public Parks, to give the name of Bryant Park to what had been known as Reservoir Square. The records of the Park Commissioners inform us that on May 21, 1884, at a meeting of these commissioners, the following resolution was offered by Commissioner Wales, and adopted:

Resolved, That under the provisions of Section 1, Chapter 282, of the laws of 1884, the public park situated between Fortieth and Forty-second Streets, Fifth and Sixth Avenues, shall hereafter be known and described as Bryant Park.

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The following remarks were then made on the resolution by Commissioner Wales, and the same were entered upon the minutes:

In response to the request urged by the friends of the late William Cullen Bryant, the Legislature has authorized the Department of Parks to change the name of Reservoir Square to Bryant Park, and in moving this resolution, I deem it fitting to say that the act is a graceful recognition of one who was alike eminent for his public and private virtues.

The city has no possessions more precious than the memory of those who, by their labors and example, have exalted the standard of citizenship. In these respects Mr. Bryant was a conspicuous illustration, and as the editor of a leading daily journal, he contributed largely toward securing for the city the Central Park, in which he always took the warmest interest.

It gives me pleasure to move this resolution, and I have no doubt it will receive the unanimous approval of this Board.

Its approval was unanimous.

This was the first official honor, so far as I am aware, ever paid by our city to the memory of Mr. Bryant, whom its press pretty unanimously acclaimed at his death as the City's Greatest Citizen.

I am happy to add here that the act under which the Park Commissioners were empowered to offer this handsome tribute to the memory of Mr. Bryant was introduced into the State Senate by a Centurion, the late Hampden Robb, whose demise we have been called upon so recently to deplore. In the Assembly the bill was handled by Hon. James Oliver, and it passed both houses without a dissenting voice.

It was not till 1895 that I thought our oppor-

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tunity for a suitable memorial site had arrived. The city authorities wished to appropriate the ground occupied by the City Hall for a municipal structure of sufficient capacity to accommodate all the offices of the municipal government, and for that purpose procured from the Legislature authority to remove the City Hall to occupy the place of the Reservoir, providing it was so reproduced as to present its original external appearance, stone for stone. As there was a very strong popular opposition to the disturbance of the City Hall, it occurred to me that the city government would be grateful for a lubricator to their scheme. I accordingly called promptly upon the mayor, Gilroy, and told him that the site of the Reservoir was an ideal place for the Tilden Library, and that its trustees would gladly accept it for such a purpose if the city would do what the law required it to do, transport the building as it stood to the Reservoir Park. Mr. Gilroy was delighted with the suggestion, and urged me to commend the idea to the *Herald* newspaper.

I took what at that stage of the game I thought a wiser course. I asked my friend Ernest Flagg, an architect of distinction, to give us a drawing of the City Hall as it would appear on the site of the Reservoir, while I should write a magazine article to explain at length the value of the City Hall as an ornament to the city when translated to the Reservoir site; how central it was for a library between the Fourth and Sixth Avenue railroads, that communicated with all parts of the continent; and of its numerous other advantages, real or imaginary.

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The article appeared with many illustrations in *Scribner's Monthly* in November, 1892. The ideas presented in it received unqualified approval from the press; and so far as I was competent to judge, the public appeared pretty much reconciled to have the City Hall removed for such a purpose.

Fortunately for the Tilden Library, and eke for the city, the Legislature the following winter repealed the law authorizing the removal of the City Hall, at the instance and request of those who had asked its enactment, I presume, because the building they proposed to construct for the accommodation of the city offices would involve an expense beyond the available resources of the city at that time. So that scheme, from which I had so much hope, temporarily fell through. But the impression which the pictures of Mr. Flagg had made upon the public mind in the city of New York, and the idea of having a public library in the place of the Reservoir on the Fifth Avenue, were destined to bear better fruit.

Almost simultaneously with the collapse of the municipal scheme, it occurred to the trustees of the Astor and the Lenox libraries, who were getting tired of struggling with their limited resources respectively, that if they had with their books the library of Mr. Tilden, and the two and a quarter millions of his bequest then in the hands of his executors added to their own revenue, it would be a good thing for all parties. So it seemed to those who had any voice in the decision of the matter; and promptly application was made to the Legislature

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for the consolidation of the libraries, followed by the municipal legislation necessary to provide for their habitation on the very site of the old Reservoir. Public sentiment was so ripe at this time for such a proposition, that not a single word but of commendation was uttered in any quarter at the appropriation of Reservoir Square to the use of the consolidated New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation, leaving the sacrosanct walls of the City Hall still standing where they were originally planted.

The consolidation of the New York Public Library in 1896 and the construction of a palace for its properties by the city, furnished the city authorities another occasion to pay an official compliment to the memory of Mr. Bryant. We applied to the Park Commission to give us a site for the Century's monument to Mr. Bryant on the esplanade immediately adjoining the west front of the New York Public Library and in the very park which bore his name. On the application of Hon. Henry Smith, then President of the Park Commission, the site of the Bryant monument on the esplanade behind the Public Library, along with the preliminary plans, was approved also by the Art Commission by the adoption of the following resolution:

On February 16, 1909:

RESOLVED, That the Art Commission hereby approves the designs and location of a statue of William Cullen Bryant to be placed in the rear of the New York Public Library, represented by Exhibits "390 A," "390 B," and "390 C" of record in this matter; and that the action of the Commission be certi-

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fied, with return of duplicates of Exhibits herein noted, to Hon. Henry Smith, Commissioner of Parks for the Boroughs of Manhattan and Richmond.

Again, February 14, 1911:

Resolved, That the Art Commission hereby approves the designs and location of a statue of William Cullen Bryant to be placed in the rear of the New York Public Library, represented by Exhibits "390 D," "390 E," and "390 F" of record in this matter.

The moment we felt sure of such an eminently eligible site for the Century's memorial monument of its former President, we set about the selection of an artist to do the work. We were fortunate enough at last to secure the service of Mr. Herbert Adams, an honored member of our Association, for that purpose.

Early in June last, Mr. Adams notified me that his statue of Mr. Bryant was finished and awaited the orders of our committee.

On the seventeenth of June, and with the concurrence of Mr. Rives, my only surviving colleague on the memorial committee, I addressed the following letter to the Reverend Henry van Dyke:

Erratum, page 10, last paragraph:

The names of W m. W. Appleton and Moses Taylor Pyne, the treasurer of our committee, were overlooked by me in enumerating its surviving members.

THE SQUIRRELS

HIGHLAND FALLS ON HUDSON, N. Y.

June 17, 1911.

My dear Dr. van Dyke:

Shortly after the death of William Cullen Bryant, in 1878, the Century Association, of which he was President, appointed a committee, of which I was designated, as chairman, to invite subscriptions for the erection of a monument to his memory. Though not present at the meeting of the Century when this resolution was passed, I accepted the trust and proceeded in the usual way to look for the money. It came sooner than a site for the monument acceptable to the committee. Years elapsed. Members of the committee, one after the other, were called away by death. The survivors murmured, for none of them was wise enough to know how providential was the delay, through which alone we have been enabled to secure a site in the park that bears Mr. Bryant's name—on the west elevation of the New York Public Library.

I am the only member of the original committee still living, and I believe Mr. George L. Rives is the only surviving member added to the original committee. A few weeks ago Mr. Herbert Adams, who was selected to prepare the monument, informed me by letter that the work was finished, had received the approval of all the members of the family, and he would be ready to deliver it to order. As Mr. Rives was one of my colleagues on the New

York Public Library Board of Trustees, and as this monument was to be erected on the esplanade to the west of the library, and as I was a prisoner of hope in the hands of a doctor at the time when the next meeting of the trustees of the library was approaching, I wrote him that I thought the fittest person in the world to speak posterity's opinion of William Cullen Bryant was the Reverend Henry van Dyke; and that I recommended his selection to be considered by the board at its approaching meeting. I inclose a copy of Mr. R.'s reply, by which you will see why I address you personally and as chairman of the Century committee, and why I look forward with confidence to its giving you pleasure to put forth to the world your mature and deliberate judgment about one whom I regard as still America's greatest poet, and whose memory I cherish as that of a most valued friend.

I am still on my back, though I feel that I am more rapidly convalescing than I had any good reason to expect to be, and I call your attention to the parties designated by Mr. Rives as the public body to be consulted in regard to whatever exercises are deemed appropriate for the occasion. At the same time, if you can find it convenient to confer with Mr. Rives himself in regard to the ceremonial, it will answer as well as if you conferred with me.

Of course the time will be at your choice, but there is no occasion to hurry the ceremonial until you are ready and such of the audience as you would desire to have shall have returned to the city.

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Please let me know at your early convenience that the task I am trying to impose upon you is a welcome and congenial one. To diminish that task as far as is in my power, I send you an order on Houghton, Mifflin & Co. for a copy of Bigelow's "Life of Bryant," which you probably have never seen, and in which you will find what intimate relations as a business associate and friend during the last quarter-century of his life seemed to me then most worthy of the interest and attention of the public.

Of course all these arrangements are subject to the approval of the Park Commission, of whose concurrence, however, I have no doubt.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN BIGELOW,
Chairman.

Two or three days later I addressed the following letter to W. Stover, President of the Park Commission, upon whose coöperation we were dependent.

THE SQUIRRELS
HIGHLAND FALLS ON HUDSON

June 19, 1911.

Dear Mr. Stover:

I presume that you have received notice, as I have, from Mr. Herbert Adams, that he is ready to

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deliver the statue of Mr. Bryant ordered by the Century Association whenever your board is ready to receive it. My colleague on the committee of the Century Association, Mr. Rives, and myself, are, I understand, the only survivors of that committee. In conference with him we have concluded that, with the approval of your board, we would desire the Reverend Henry van Dyke to be selected as the orator for the occasion, leaving him to name the time when it will be convenient for him to be ready, if he should be pleased to accept our invitation,—as I do not much doubt he will be. If you contemplate any other exercises or ceremonial on the occasion, I shall ask Mr. Rives to confer with you, and whatever you can agree upon is quite sure to suit me. For my own part, the address of Dr. van Dyke is all, I think, that would be necessary, so far as the Century Association is concerned, and the more time given to him for the purpose the more satisfactory would probably be the result to the public.

I can conceive of no special reason for haste, and it has occurred to me that it would be more convenient and satisfactory to all interested to defer the unveiling of the statue until any time in October that may be agreeable to your board, and when the members of the Century Association are likely for the most part to be in town.

I shall ask Mr. Rives to consult with you on these subjects, for, though convalescing daily, I cannot yet foresee the time when I shall be strong enough to visit New York again.

With this mail I shall communicate my wishes to

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Dr. van Dyke, and will lose no time in notifying you of the answer I receive from him.

Yours truly,

JOHN BIGELOW,
Chairman.

On the tenth of July I received the following letter from the Reverend Mr. van Dyke:

FIRWOOD

SEAL HARBOR, MAINE

July 9, 1911.

Dear Mr. Bigelow:

Returning from my salmon-fishing in Canada, I found here last night your welcome letter of June 17,—doubly welcome because it brings assurance that "Richard is himself again," even though he says he is "still on his back." I thought of you often during your illness, and had a strong impulse to write to you, but hesitated to intrude with only a message of affection,—for all I had to say was that we love you and want you to get well. You see, the world is growing old so fast, and energetic young men are so rare, that we can't afford to spare you. It is true that you have learned how to gain more while on your back than most men do while on their feet: you are a disciple of Sleep,—

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the wise and gentle nurse who lifts
The soul grown weary of the waking world
And lays it, with its troubled thoughts all still,
Its questions quiet, and its passions furled,
On the deep bosom of the Eternal Will,—

but even so, I heartily wish you up and about soon again.

It is gratifying that you should think of me in connection with the address of dedication at the unveiling of the Bryant statue. There are other men who could do it better,—you above all. And if you are well and strong enough,—as I hope you will be,—you simply must perform this duty. Think what it would mean to us all, to hear you, his biographer and friend, speak of this lofty poet and noble citizen. But if you wish me to hold myself ready as your “understudy,” I will gladly do so. The time of the dedication would best be late in October or early in November: the former for an out-of-door service, the latter if the “exercises” are to be indoors.

Your “Life of Bryant” helped me greatly in the preparation of my lecture on the poet, at the Sorbonne. But the book is now shut up in my library at Avalon, so I shall gratefully avail myself of your kind order for another copy which H. M. & Co. will send directly here. But my first choice is for you to make the address, and my second choice is for you to write it and let me read it.

As ever,

Faithfully yours,

HENRY VAN DYKE.

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To this letter I sent the following acknowledgment:

THE SQUIRRELS

HIGHLAND FALLS ON HUDSON

July 12, 1911.

My dear Dr. van Dyke:

I was made very happy last evening by the receipt of your favor of the ninth inst. assuring me that we could rely upon you to make the Bryant speech at the unveiling of his statue on the twenty-fourth of October. What you say of my delivering this address is, of course, very amiable and lovely on your part, but aside from other considerations, I delivered a memorial address before the Century shortly after Mr. Bryant's death, and also subsequently wrote a biography of Mr. Bryant at the request of Houghton, Mifflin & Co. of Boston, in which I attempted to tell the public all that I could be presumed to know of the poet from my long and intimate association with him during the last quarter-century of his life. It would be very unbecoming in me, by appropriating this occasion to myself, to imply that I am the only one who appreciates his merit as a poet, and the only one who is concerned for his fame; and I esteem myself peculiarly fortunate in securing for this occasion a person so much more competent than myself or anybody else of my acquaintance to express posterity's opinion of America's earliest and, in my judgment, still our

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greatest poet. The nation will listen with breathless interest to what you will say ex-cathedra of Mr. Bryant, and I sincerely hope I may by that time be well enough to be one of your audience.

You are aware that this statue is erected at the expense of members of the Century Association, but the statue will be sheltered in the Bryant Park at the expense of the city, and if there are any conditions for which you would like special provision made, I hope you will communicate them to Mr. Stover, the President of the Park Commission, or to Mr. George L. Rives, my associate committeeman. I hope also you will find it convenient to call at the studio of Mr. Adams to see whether you can suggest any improvement to his work, to which all the surviving members of the poet's family have given, I am told, their unanimous approval.

Your greatly obliged and faithful friend,

JOHN BIGELOW.

Rev. Dr. Henry van Dyke,
Firwood, Seal Harbor, Maine.

On the thirty-first of July Mr. Adams sent me a note, of which the following is an interesting extract:

"I saw the bronze the other day and I am very much pleased with the cast. It is in one piece, which is quite unusual for a work of this size and intricacy. It is a remarkably perfect cast—sharp, clean, and without spongy places or tin spots,—defects which are liable to arise, even with the best of

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intentions on every one's part. It was cast by the Gorham Co. at Providence. Their works are quite out of the city, with extensive grounds all about them. Now that the statue is not to be set in place for a few months, I am having the clean bronze set up out-of-doors, in the hope that the elements, with a little assistance, will make us a better patina than we ordinarily can produce by the use of chemicals—yes, alas,—sometimes pigment, too, when the work has to be given to the public as soon as it is out of the foundry."

My friends and fellow Centurions, I have now the privilege and the honor to invite you all to witness the ceremony of the unveiling of the statue of Mr. Bryant on the twenty-fourth of October, at an hour and place of which you will be duly notified by our secretary. I hope you will all make a conscientious effort to be present. For permit me to remind you that this Anno Domini 1911 should be regarded as the Jubilee year of the Century, for it connates especially notable civic honors bestowed upon two of our most renowned deceased members. First was the formal association of Mr. Tilden as one of the founders of the New York Public Library and a structure for it which for the purpose contemplated can hardly be said to have any superior if an equal in any other country.

Second, the erection of a monumental statue of the Father of American Poetry, William Cullen Bryant, one of the founders as well as one of the presidents of our Association.

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This statue of Mr. Bryant will occupy the place of honor on the west center of the New York Public Library in the park which bears the poet's name.

Mr. Tilden and Mr. Bryant were intimate friends during more than the last half of their lives, and nothing could be more fitting than the proximity of their respective and most enduring civic monuments.

JOHN BIGELOW,
Chairman.



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